



A BALTIMORE NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA





"Heritage areas should tell nationally important stories through a regionally distinctive combination of natural, cultural, historic, and scenic resources, and they should provide outstanding opportunities for conservation."



A “National Heritage Area” is a place designated by the United States Congress where natural, cultural, historic and recreational resources combine to form a cohesive, nationally distinctive landscape arising from patterns of human activity shaped by geography.



In 2001 the Baltimore Heritage Area (BHA) was certified by the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority, in recognition of the outstanding quality of its historic, cultural, and natural resources and the potential to foster greater understanding of the seminal role Baltimore has played in the nation's history. In five short years, the partnerships fostered through BHA have brought life to the city's history and culture, enriched the visitor experience, and produced a national model of heritage education in schools.

In 2006, with most of the initiatives in its original Management Action Plan met or underway, BHA undertook an Update to the plan and a Feasibility Study for national heritage area (NHA) designation. Designation as an NHA by Congress is a distinct honor and inspires greater pride in a region's heritage, which can foster increased support for the stewardship of important historic, cultural, and natural resources.

BALTIMORE HERITAGE AREA

The heritage area includes the heart of Baltimore—its central and oldest neighborhoods, the downtown, and the waterfront—and innumerable historic, cultural, and natural resources. Eligibility for NHA designation depends primarily on the presence of sites, structures, artifacts, traditions, and cultural practices important to understanding the nation's history.

Why Baltimore?

Baltimore evidences exemplary national heritage themes and retains vast amounts of intact historic, cultural, and natural resources. It is time to raise the city's profile in the national psyche as one of the premier locations in America to experience American history. It is a place of distinct and important history, reflecting Baltimore's unique role in the story of the nation; the city has played a seminal role in the shaping of the American identity.

What then is the American,
this new man?

—*John de Crevecoeur, 1782*

A definitive answer to Crevecoeur's question is impossible, for American society and culture constantly change and evolve. American identity—like America itself—is a work in progress.

At the same time there have been defining moments of national self-recognition. The first such moment took place in Baltimore in September 1814. The British navy bombarded Fort McHenry while 16,000 Baltimore defenders gathered to protect their city and nation. Francis Scott Key articulated what it meant to be an American at that moment, and straight away, his poem-turned-song was hailed and embraced throughout the country. Thus, an American identity, catalyzed by Key's "Star Spangled Banner," was first defined in Baltimore.

To a young country engaged in a floundering war effort, the Battle of Baltimore represented the definitive end of the American Revolution, secured American sovereignty, and gave the country's inhabitants two enduring symbols: the flag itself and the poem that celebrated its survival. Both immediately became national icons, representing the broad ideals and values of the country while also embodying the intangible nature of what it means to be an American.

In subsequent generations' experiences with struggle, anticipation, creativity, controversy, and debate, this dynamic and evolving American identity was elaborated and reworked while its roots and initial manifestation remained securely embedded in nineteenth-century Baltimore.

Baltimore played an important ongoing role in American life after its 1814 military triumph. As sectional strife between North and South intensified through the nineteenth century, Baltimore was in the middle geographically, politically, commercially, socially, and culturally. Here was the nation's largest population of free Blacks, at the edge of slavery. Here was the home that shaped two of the nation's giants in the African American push for equality and opportunity—Frederick Douglass and Thurgood Marshall.

After the Civil War, Baltimore continued to be a place of convergences: an ethnically diverse, industrial, east coast seaport city with a climate and disposition recognizably southern. It was simultaneously freewheeling, rough-and-tumble, genteel, sophisticated, gritty, entrepreneurial, working class, democratic, hierarchical, outspoken, and deferential. Many of these qualities are still apparent today.

Baltimore, then, is in a unique position to tell the story of the birth and evolution of American identity, for many of America's core tendencies and proclivities are illustrated in the city. In this dynamic and protean port city, instructive stories about freedom, opportunity, inventiveness, diversity, and convergence are deeply rooted and readily apparent.

PORTAL TO AMERICAN IDENTITY: INTERPRETIVE FRAMEWORK

A major element of the feasibility study is the interpretive framework that underlies Baltimore's national significance. Four core themes provide intellectual structure; each is enriched by several sub-themes. The city's cultural organizations and educators are excited and several are already developing innovative programming around them.

Crosscurrents in Freedom

- Securing Independence: The Battle of Baltimore
- The Presence and Power of a Free Black Community
- Triumphs of the Underground Railroad
- In Pursuit of Civil Rights
- Realizing Religious Freedom

Gateway to Possibilities

- An International Port City on the Chesapeake Bay
- Immigrant Influx: Expanding the Mix
- Developing New Enterprises: Textiles, Railroads, and Canneries
- Organizing Labor
- The Quest for an Education



Inventing Baltimore in the Chesapeake

- Foresight and Innovation: Parks and Public Works
- Planning: Architecture and Building
- Making a Living at the Water's Edge
- In Pursuit of Knowledge: Education, Science, and Medicine
- Creating Something Special: Arts and Culture
- Competition and Camaraderie: Sports in a Sporting Town
- Living Traditions

North of the South—South of the North

- A Diverse City in the Middle
- Biodiversity on the Boundaries
- Border Politics in a Time of Polarization
- And the War Came: Baltimore on the Margins
- Segregation, Integration & the Civil Rights Struggle

VISION—TEN YEARS HENCE

In 2016, the following will be true: Across the nation, Baltimore is viewed as one of America's premier historic cities, considered a must-see destination for its richness of history, culture, and natural settings. As never before, the city's abundant heritage resources are viewed as essential to its quality of life and economy. Such recognition is a tribute to the dedication of the Baltimore Heritage Area and the scores of museums, sites, and cultural organizations responsible for exceptional programming that has brought greater visibility to the city's role in shaping a distinctly American identity.

Goal: *Foster understanding of Baltimore as the unique port city where an American identity was forged and refined.*
Actions include creating a detailed interpretive plan; producing educational materials; leveraging the bicentennial of the War of 1812 to build broad understanding of Baltimore history; focusing attention on under-appreciated, nationally significant stories (ex: African American push for equality and opportunity); and teaching American history using Baltimore's cultural heritage resources.

Goal: *Strengthen support for preservation of Baltimore's heritage resources.*

Actions include advocating for heritage tourism development and stewardship of the city's heritage resources; strengthening existing historic preservation programs and incentives; and supporting water quality and urban forestry enhancement initiatives.

Goal: *Increase economic benefits of heritage tourism in Baltimore.*
Actions include supporting efforts to develop or expand businesses serving the heritage traveler, such as overnight accommodations in adapted historic buildings.

Goal: *Assist neighborhoods in improving their quality of life, becoming more visitor-ready, and balancing tourism and community.*

Actions include fostering connections among neighborhoods and key attractions; assisting less-visited neighborhoods to feel more inviting to visitors; and incorporating land- and water-based recreation into connective strategies.

Goal: *Assure a strong, sustainable management organization for the Baltimore Heritage Area.*

Actions include diversifying BHA funding sources; collaborating even more effectively with the city's historic, cultural, and natural resource organizations; and strengthening partnerships with the National Park Service.

BHA PARTNERSHIPS BRING RESULTS

In only five years, BHA has demonstrated an ability to build strong partnerships and achieve results. The organization's forty-person board includes leaders from the city's major heritage, cultural, tourism, business, and government organizations. Among BHA's accomplishments are several ambitious partnership projects:

- The Star-Spangled Trails, a series of fifteen guided and self-guided tours around the city that intersect at the state-of-the-art trailhead facility at the Inner Harbor Visitor Center
- A system of well-designed pedestrian wayfinding signage around the city
- The Authentic Baltimore program, whose 70+ sites, services, and events meet high standards for authenticity and quality
- "Teaching American History," institutes that help teachers use Baltimore's key historic resources to engage kids in learning American history
- *Road Wars*, a documentary about the successful resistance to a 1960's plan that would have paved the Inner Harbor and historic neighborhoods for a highway

NATIONALLY SIGNIFICANT HERITAGE RESOURCES

In addition to Fort McHenry National Monument and Historic Shrine, the city's 24 National Historic Landmarks include the *U.S.S. Constellation*, the Star-Spangled Banner Flag House, the Mount Vernon Historic District, and the B&O Transportation Museum. Baltimore's impressive array of historic structures—over 276 designated districts or landmarks comprising over 53,000 individual properties on the National Register of Historic Places—are spread over the city's downtown, waterfront and many historic neighborhoods. This abundance illustrates ample opportunity and challenge in preserving and interpreting the nation's cultural heritage in Baltimore.

BHA provides two of the most significant national heritage stories at the locus of black history and the transformative effects of education, for the experiences of African Americans and the power of education are core elements of American identity. While a slave, Frederick Douglass learned to read in Baltimore and credited his time in the city as the foundation for his accomplishments. Thurgood Marshall's public school education in Baltimore led directly to his unparalleled contributions to civil rights as an attorney in Baltimore and as a United States Supreme Court Justice. The school building he attended (PS 103) and his home in the Upton neighborhood offer significant opportunities to inform Americans about the power of education.

Interview of Juan Williams, Thurgood Marshall biographer, on National Public Radio

DAVID GERGEN: What gave him his drive, his passion as a man between that time he was born in Baltimore? Was it the growing up in Baltimore: Was it going to the NAACP? What was it?

JUAN WILLIAMS: You know, what's fascinating for me as the biographer here is to understand the impact that place had on this individual...And in Marshall's case, the fact that he comes from Baltimore, Maryland, is essential to understanding what gives him the vision and the drive. He has a sense, I think, that the world should be like Baltimore, as Baltimore was for him as a child...He has a sense of black people having the capacity to run their own businesses, lead their own religious institutions, have their own newspapers. He sees this as the way the world is.



Going to live in Baltimore
laid the foundation, and
opened the gateway, to all my
subsequent prosperity.

—Frederick Douglass, 1845

Although Baltimore is an urban environment, important natural and recreational resources can be found within the BHA boundaries. Most remarkable is BHA's network of linear stream valley parks and parkways, resulting from the 1904 Olmsted plan for Baltimore. Leakin Park is one of the East Coast's largest wilderness parks. The Middle Branch of the Patapsco is a classic Chesapeake landscape, simultaneously displaying the red clay described by John Smith, a state-of-the-art container terminal, an international cruise ship terminal, recreational marinas and restaurants, the Baltimore Rowing Club, scenic views for hikers and bikers on the Gwynns Falls Trail, a planned environmental education center, and habitat for hundreds of species of fish and wildlife.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

The management plan that led to BHA's certification grew from an extensive civic engagement and public involvement process, now sustained for more than six years. A major role of BHA is to engage the many organizations that manage cultural, historical, and natural sites and resources and with them develop and implement initiatives that engage thousands of Baltimoreans as well as visitors.

Oversight for the feasibility study was provided by the broadly comprised BHA Board of Directors, with representatives from 40 different organizations in the Baltimore region, many of which are themselves umbrella organizations that represent other groups. In addition, the interpretive framework benefited from the active involvement of a cross-section of the diverse community of historians in Baltimore. This ensured that the emerging themes included the most current research and scholarly perspectives.

MANAGING THE BALTIMORE HERITAGE AREA

Three alternatives for managing BHA were explored. They are:

- Continue solely as a state-certified heritage area.
- Pursue National Heritage Area designation.
- Pursue new Baltimore National Park Service Units.

It is the finding of the Feasibility Study planning that Baltimore is eligible for national heritage area designation based on the extensive presence of nationally significant heritage and associated historical, cultural and natural resources and the strong public support BHA has engendered. New park units are not likely in the short term given current NPS budget constraints. Furthermore, designating Baltimore as a national heritage area offers benefit to the NPS. The city's unique and significant resources will complement those already in NPS park units or heritage areas elsewhere, and the energetic, active support from heritage area partners promises to create significant return for the organization's investment.

BHA's management entity is a strong partner and conduit for NPS involvement. As BHA seeks national designation, its steady track record of achievements represents a significant opportunity for NPS to extend its mission at modest cost.

The Baltimore Heritage Area is ready to go to the next level. With the bicentennial of the War of 1812 on the horizon, national designation is a fitting acknowledgement of Baltimore's seminal contribution to the American identity.

Four Critical Steps to National Heritage Area

BHA has completed the four critical steps required for NPS support of designation:

- 1: Completion of the Feasibility Study
- 2: Public involvement in the study
- 3: Demonstration of widespread support
- 4: Commitments from key constituents

The Baltimore Heritage Area Board of Directors undertook the Feasibility Study and an Update of the Management Action Plan for the Baltimore Heritage Area in 2006. A list of board members can be found at www.baltimorecity.gov/government/heritage. Funding support was generously provided by the Abell Foundation, France-Merrick Foundations, William G. Baker, Jr. Memorial Fund, and a National Park Service Civic Engagement Grant.